

SENATE BILL 1087

By Ford, O.

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 15,
relative to Harriet Tubman Day in Tennessee.

WHEREAS, Harriet Ross Tubman was born into slavery in Bucktown, Maryland, in or around the year 1820 and later escaped slavery in 1849; and

WHEREAS, she became a “conductor” on the famed Underground Railroad leading hundreds of slaves to freedom; and

WHEREAS, countless numbers of slaves traveling the Underground Railroad through Tennessee followed the ridges and valleys of East Tennessee from Chattanooga northward towards the Cumberland Gap, often receiving shelter in locations such as the Bell-Herrin House in Washington County, the Griffiths House in Loudon County, and a secret cave in the Friendsville Community of Blount County. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, escaped slaves from Georgia and Alabama received aid from the Beck family whose property is currently part of the Chattanooga Golf and Country Club located in the Riverview/Dallas Heights area of Chattanooga north of the Tennessee River; and

WHEREAS, persons seeking freedom along the Underground Railroad through Middle Tennessee routinely followed the Cumberland River, while others traveled overland due north towards the Ohio River; and

WHEREAS, many other slaves found their way to freedom along the Underground Railroad in Tennessee traveling the Mississippi River by way of Memphis in West Tennessee, where safe haven could be found in places such as the Burkle Estate, with its secret cellar and escape route; and

WHEREAS, it is estimated that as many as 100,000 people escaped slavery on the Underground Railroad from 1810 to 1850, and of that number countless thousands began their escape in Tennessee, or passed through the state en route to freedom; and

WHEREAS, Harriet Tubman's exemplary leadership and heroic exploits along the Underground Railroad earned her the title of "Moses of Her People"; and

WHEREAS, she became an effective leader in the abolitionist movement and later served in the Civil War as a soldier, spy, nurse, scout, and cook; and

WHEREAS, in addition to her efforts to end slavery, Harriet Tubman was a noted advocate of equality under the law for women, as demonstrated by her membership in the National Federation of Afro-American Women, the National Association of Colored Women, and the New England Women's Suffrage Association; and

WHEREAS, women's groups in Tennessee have celebrated this historic woman on the date of her death for many years, honoring her contributions both to society and women's rights; and

WHEREAS, Harriet Tubman continued to fight for dignity, rights, opportunity, and justice on behalf of all people until her death in Auburn, New York, on March 10, 1913; and

WHEREAS, the subjects of Harriet Tubman's life and the Underground Railroad are regularly studied by the young scholars of Tennessee, including 2005 Tennessee History Day award winners Megan Crowell, Allison Mills, Sarah Paris, Whitney Nicole Adsit, Chris Chiego, Jessica Rutledge, Mindy Patrick, Katelyn Burnett, and Jessica Cox. In addition, professional scholars have devoted themselves to the study of the Underground Railroad, including Mr. Raymond E. Evans of the Chattanooga African American Museum in *Chattanooga: Tennessee's Gateway to the Underground Railroad*; and

WHEREAS, observation of Harriet Tubman Day began in the 1960s, first celebrated in the month of June by the late Ms. Addie Clash Travers of Cambridge, Maryland. The celebration included a commemorative program at the historical Bazel Methodist Episcopal Church in Bucktown, Maryland; and

WHEREAS, the people of Tennessee have sought to permanently honor the memory of Harriet Tubman by naming important public facilities and initiatives in her honor, including the Harriet Tubman housing complex and Harriet Tubman Express teen life skills program in Chattanooga and Harriet Tubman Park located on Harriet Tubman Street in Knoxville, and

WHEREAS, in Public Law 101-252 and Presidential Proclamation 6107, the United States Congress and former President of the United States of America, George Herbert Walker Bush, proclaimed March 10, 1990, as Harriet Tubman Day and called upon the people of the United States to observe such day with appropriate ceremonies and activities; now therefore, BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 15, Chapter 2, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

§ 15-2-111.

March 10 of each year shall be observed as “Harriet Tubman Day,” to be proclaimed as such by the governor to honor and recognize Harriet Tubman for her important role in the history of Tennessee and the United States of America as an abolitionist and champion of equal rights for all people. This day shall not be a legal holiday as defined in § 15-1-101.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.